

Sola Poēta

Issue II



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Silver Starling Press
LEAMINGTON

Sola Poēta

ISSN 2371-6940

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Published by Silver Starling Press, Leamington, Ontario

Email: silverstarlingpress@gmail.com

Publisher Website: <https://silverstarlingpress.wixsite.com/home>

Magazine site: <https://silverstarlingpress.wixsite.com/home/solapoeta>

Editor: Andreas Gripp

Front Cover and Back Cover Photos: Andreas Gripp

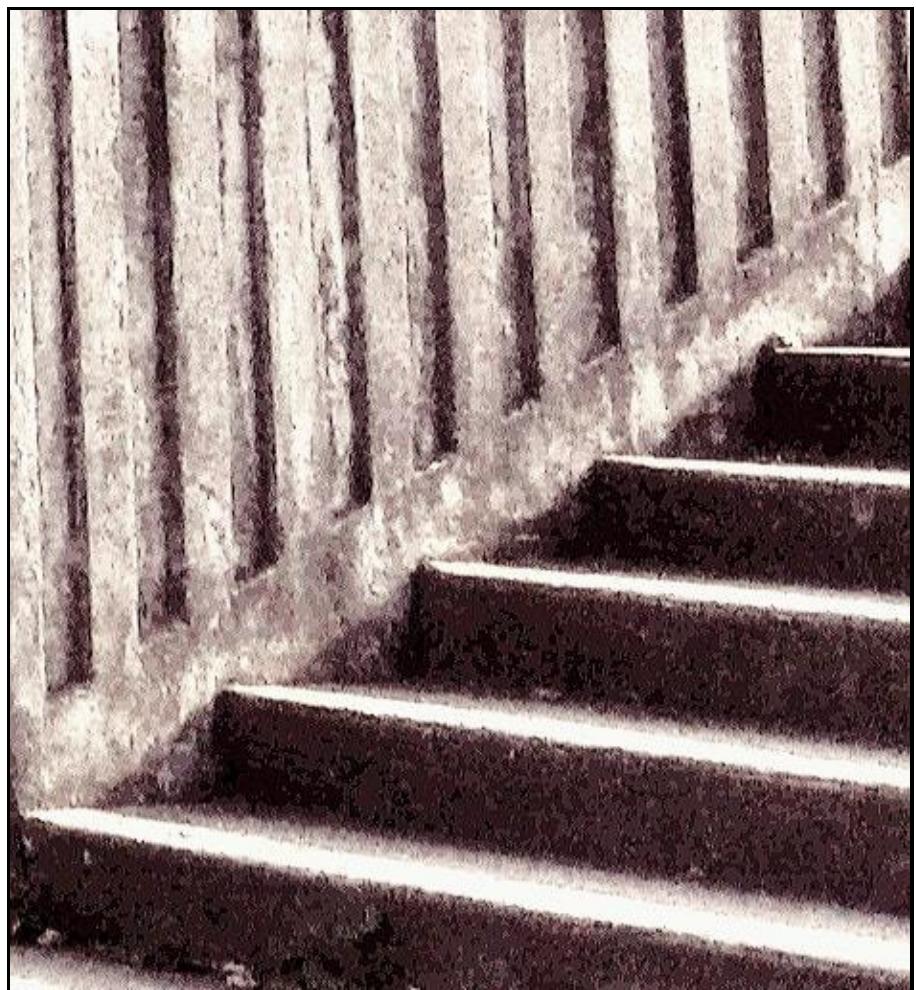
Preface and End Page Photos: Andreas Gripp

Text font for poetry is Palatino Linotype 12pt.

Publication Date: Spring 2025

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Noteworthy

The pianist delicately rolled
the Moonlight's first movement—
the sound of moonbeams illuminating Lake Huron.

Then he syncopated the second,
raindrops jazzing the lake's surface
on this musical cruise.

The third's profusion of notes galloped—
herons surface-diving the hapless pickerel.

He can play all of Beethoven's 22 sonatas
in one moon-rise and set.

I learned movements one and two—
playing the first as moon-speckled still waters
and the second as drops skirting the Island Queen.
But the third's non-moon-like deluge eludes me.
My arthritic, amateur fingers namaste
in awe of the Maestro's full-moon dancing fingers.

Bad call, I played the first to a piano-teacher friend
who yelled *Stop!* mid-movement.
Months later, I'm back riding the moonbeam
for my own pleasure,
wrong notes sliding inside the shine.

Bested Intentions

New Year's Eve's unspoken pronouncements
dance like dust bunnies over my carpet.
Crumbs on kitchen counters shout, Be Mindful!
Resolve sashays out the balcony doors.
Cat Henry caterwauls Promises to claw my poems.
I fortify Intentions with giggling squirrels.
Hope throws Purpose down the elevator.
Neighbour's dog barks in the key of Yip.
Resolutions foam in Resolve detergent.
Acrylic paints pour their hearts out.
I wrap binding Rules in coleslaw,
pitch them down the garbage chute.
Unclaimed, unmeasured, Time
luxuriates on my plump sofa, all smiles
as I head to bed before the witching hour.

The Gloaming Story

The night is coming, dark and thick,
as if the black color is celebrating its birthday.
The kids go to bed,
the grownups drink wine in this
vinous kind of hour.

And then all gets quiet.
The windows are illuminated only by the TV
screens, but they are all mute.
Even the big trees on the street are silent.

Darkness, you use your silencer
on everything that moves or squats in the mud.
Now you point it right at my mouth!

Will I be able to sing at least one song before
I fell silent forever?
Will you let me finish this book in which
the protagonist is about to cut off his tongue?

Short Sweet Song

*Have little care that life is brief,
And less that art is long;
Success is in the silences,
Though fame is in the song.*

—Bliss Carman's *epitaph*

Nymphs emerge from languid pools
of pearly roe and algae, live along thin
rays of summer sun; morphing, they
have little care that life is brief.

Dragonflies stitch the air,
sketch lines of elegant directness,
take comfort in their short science,
and less that art is long.

They flounce fleet, ephemeral lives—
gesturing, posturing essential perpetuation
and propagation—they know
success is in the silences.

What are they that we extol
their swift, divine souls; that we sing
their part? They make not a sound
though fame is in the song.

carambola

there's an awkwardness in me
a graceless waxyyellow way
 I easel-stand
and rock to rest
 on the arborite counter
only when dissected across the beam
 will a star shine
with a flavour somewhere between
 a tea rose and an Anjou pear

Bluebagopolis

(My native city once rejoiced in the name of Linenopolis)

Blue bags soaring in the air
Blue bags mired in the gutter.
On every tree and fence
They flutter.
In the car parks
They sough, and scuffle and mutter.

One party's answer
To this pyrric bacchanalia—
Let them eat Gaelic
Let them eat Feile.
I know no one who wants to be told
Gerry's brainchild's meconium
Is not a crock of gold.

A swarm of stinging jellyfish,
Ghosts and shrouds and cauls;
Puffs of ack ack and
Burdenless parachutes fall.

I imagine blue bags
Smother the corner boys
Like the leucocytes in
Fantastic Voyage.

Staying in bed to sleep it off,
Small stones appear
(from what etheric plane?)
In your bed.
Who in Bluebagopolis could explain?

But you pull the duvet over your head
And struggling,
Bring back you wife from the dead.

A Feast of Ortolan

Her outsize hoodie covered her face
When they start serving Ortolans in KFC deep
under High St the Farset flows
the Lotus Eaters pull their sleeping bags tight
in the doorways like stray maggots in a tackle box
This is where the magic happens, in a chafing dish
made from a beer can bottom.
On the wand this legend is inscribed NEVER SHARE.

The Dream of Howard Kirk

Outside The Falls Library
Magpies sound like sewing machines.
Inside, mass typing
Echoes their chattering.

One day, our messages
Will arrive before they are sent.
Then, Kirk The History Man's
Abolition of privacy
Will arrive via Mercury
Of the winged heels.
With warp engines on his sandals.
Nanometric drones will be
More common than dust.
Broadcasting every scintilla of us.
Selfie pouts will evolve
To be prouder still
Than flies' proboscides.

The Congo with its Coltan
Will be the new world's Omphalos.

Upper Pitt Lake

Five striated bluff faces
fulminating grandfathers, long toothed
with feldspar hair and dripping beards

gaze voiceless over the ululation
of loons, the slate lake song
circumspect in their own surmise

scanning the scene with pointy
gray fingers, the far side's cliff
cave, where centipedes anoint

themselves in the screechy dark
I'm infatuated with things that
creep and slide under rocks

lustrous salamander in his red
aerobics suit, giant spider
spinning alone, inchworm

doubling itself and unfolding
lime-green, straight
across my palm

My Mother's Hands

One last look at my mother's living hands:
blue rivering veins

Mountainous knuckles
swathed in skin's diaphanous veil

Ring long removed
tracks a circular narrative

Unconsciously she brushes
aside a host of crumbs

Gesture of grace
unwitting etiquette

even in propinquity of death

The Grace of Rosslyn and Georgetown

Taking in the Potomac River
From the bridge, above the shoreline
Where the current laps
At the gray rocks down below

The dappled surface
Is still smooth enough to hold
Onto the reflections
Of nearby towers and monuments

Floating images of success
Taken from history encased in marble
Or the present rising
In steel and glass edifices

I fight the inkling to jump,
Hitting the water so I might embrace
All these floating signs
Of worlds closed off to me

But I tell myself that falling will not
Cause a rise in anyone's esteem
No matter how poetic
My death or injuries might seem

Besides, what would my survivors
Say about the trip south?
Better to drown
Drunk and chasing the moon

Languages

I was kicked out of Hebrew school
by a black hat from Brooklyn
for adding *chachacha*
to every prayer.

I can't tell a *beit* from *kaf*

but of this I'm sure:

God

on the days when I believe in him
speaks no Hebrew Latin
Arabic or Greek
but only listens to
the language of the heart.

He doesn't have a chosen plant
much less a chosen people
though he tends to favor lovers
who trace his Holy Name
in fine calligraphy
upon each other's flesh.

He is the God of children
racing madly after kites
flailing their arms
as if they were conducting
an imaginary symphony.

The God of dolphins
clicking their tongues in praise.
The God of the *khamsin*
blowing his warm, dry breath
across the Sahara
as He breathed life into Adam
as He fashioned Eve from sand.

charcuterie board

after dinner he rests

his head on my collar,

digs his nose

into my shoulder

bone, says maybe

this is ironic, but—

since you've stopped eating

your shoulder reminds me

of a charcuterie board.

no smoked meat pillow

or soft cheese

just the herbed oak

of your collar bone,

a rogue rose

-mary sprig

cushioning my jaw.

cockroach cannibal

alone again

i search the internet
for cockroaches

click links
bruised cobalt, violet

tear open egg sac
pages, casually

glance my phone's silence
lean into a german

cockroach sprawled across the screen
a floridian sunbather.

i read that cockroaches love
to nest in bathroom drains,

climb the plumbing's salve,
moisten their hard shells,

feast on soap scum & grout,
grated skin cells,

the walnut skullcap
of another cockroach's head,

wings chewed like sheets
of dead foot skin,

gingerbread stomachs
gnawed into crumbed organs.

i understand what it's like:
feelings crawling on top

of feelings, body cracked
like a roach's exo-

skeleton, guts slurped,
tongue-scraped.

when boyfriend got his
corporate promotion

i begged for a little more
time—eyes buried in email

he stopped trying

to nibble & nip
my cherry blossom lips

chapped with a forced smile
cheeks stretched wide

cramped into thinking
everything

is going to be fine
as cockroaches

rolled down
the bathroom cabinet

poured out the medicine
 chest ran

past the wrinkled
 calendar that

marked the day he stopped
& said *will you be my boyfriend?*

lockdown

deadbolted in the basement,
last night's rain water

soaked into yesterday's socks,
each step, a hoarse whistle

sung over a soggy mop,
the smell—dead dog rot.

this is life now

locked underground,
trying to stretch

the cracks in my face
towards shaving sunlight

puddled on a single tile

puddled on a single tile,
flood water & mold, algae

blooms fill the basement
with thick, wet perfume.

how do i love
a house that holds me

captive?

news cycles
through broken

heat vent, echoes
monotone death tolls

monotone death tolls echo
months trapped in the dark

alone, listening
boyfriend frozen

on my lap
—top. his voice—

clenched, trying
to find hope

threaded through the holes in my face
when i ask is this worth it?

is this worth it?
mildew kisses in unwashed sheet,

dust-covered cherry blossoms
cower in the dark,

two lovers smile,
the green-pink buds, forever

flowerless.

The Interstice of Still In Love

Sometimes every space inside, all fascia,
all tissue, feels bound over into something other,
not blood nor bone, but folio and scratched-out text.

I need to drink in each letter, roll vowels
and consonants in the cave of my mouth,
and savor the sweet poison of my lost voice.

Nostalgia for an old vernacular, yes. Memories
shaped and serifed with their Paris green taste spreading
from tongue to gut to limb. Or maybe, I need absinthe—

a temporary retrieve—with its fennel flavor
latched to each twisted arc and break of line. What shapes
itself into my wet joints, each one a broken vow?

The interstice of still in love becomes Palatino,
the iron-lettered font rusting between ribs and pericardium.
In place of my ruptured appendix, the gravel-white grit

of Copperplate. Between radius and ulna, Arial,
that tiny, clever font, circling in and around bones and space,
making a necessary restraint of the left arm—

the arm that holds the hand ready to punch out bitter
space between membrane & bone. My body cannot forget its
intaglio: words, guttered & leaded, font making thesis of flesh.

What Dreams May Come

She falls through moonlight's fist, gathers her wings,
and slips in like a tincture of rain. Etched in pitch

a path grows and feathers crystal ice on a pale glass pane.
Something inside me wants to speak, to push away

the night-spilt scent of her. But I am obsessed.
Her mouth, that palace of vowels, castle of consonants—

the stillness of her unsaid. Turtle-dove, myrrh,
the indigo moan of her lips shaping my name with silence.

Her eyes glisten. Her voice opens aorta, atrium,
ventricle. My heart: *quick, quick*, each beat a question

even as I see myself reflected in her eyes—
each one a lozenge rounded, a troche medicated;

I would close them with my tongue, kiss
the wounded lids white as chalk and grieve

each small breath—but I don't move, fletched
as I am in this brief and mortal coil.

Clickbait

News sites have become
a one-trick pony.

My friend in California
read The Big One's
Coming Soon—*Here's Why*

causing her to
toss her Dodgers' tix:
front row, behind-the-
fucking plate,

and who *wouldn't*
want the reason that
any moment now,
the concrete
will be cascading
on their skull?

New Yorkers fare
no better: Rats Are
Winning the War
Inside Our Sewers—
Here's Why

as if the cause
will bring some comfort,
the pâtisserie on
Madison Ave—breathing a
bated *sigh* of much relief,
knowing the *basis*
why the vermin
are suddenly baked into
their scones, nibbling all the
seeds from every bagel,
their droppings
resembling pepper
juiced on steroids.

And it never-ever ends:

This Summer Will Sear Us
All—*Here's Why*

Trump Will Be Suspending
the Constitution—*Here's Why*

The World Will End
Tomorrow—*Here's Why*

My dear, headline
editor, I appreciate
your paper
needs the views,
that you're dependent
on our black cat
curiosity, our hanging
on your *why*
like it's the bottom of the
ninth—bases loaded,
full count,

the reliever with only
one pitch in his arsenal,
locked into his windup
like it's the final thing on
earth he'll ever throw.

Symmetry

Your child asks,
*why do we have
an extra eye
but not an extra
nose?*

The second serves
as spare, I answer,
though not quite
accurately.

We've a pair of
hands and feet.
Ensuring our survival
should one of them be lost
or come to fail.

As for that additional
nose, we would lose
our equilibrium,
our visage
gone askew;
we wouldn't
survive the smell of
rotten eggs,

a johnny-
on-the-spot that's run
amok.

Your moppet
is unfazed: *what about
our mouth?*

I respond in a way
that will cease these
silly questions—

an extra mouth
would inflate our
dental bills, double our root
canals,

cause us to cup our ears—
at the *chaos*
of conversation,
voices like a match
of table tennis, bouncing
here and there, the ping
and pong of madness,

when it's better not to
speak & only listen:

to the splash of
creek on stone,
the sparrow
in its bush
and spilling tears,
shed from both its
ducts, its mate upon the
ground with broken
wing, the other still
a-flutter, stretching in
its hell to reach the sky.

Noah, at St. Francis

With the most recent
tabulations
from the Department
of Global Poetry,
there are 685 billion, 278
million, 431 thousand,
294 poems about birds in
trees. Poems with only trees
and not a bird
have not been tallied.
Or, suffice to say, vice-
versa.

Today there was a
shelling in
Jabalya—a boy
without his hands. Today
there was another
missing girl. Her mother
ever-fretful
on Kettle Point. Today
Jacko ran the red
when you were shopping.

Your son will come and
visit as he grows. Writing
40 poems about the
wrens, who dart between the
branches every dawn.

Play *chicken* with the sun
when no one's looking. It never
leaves its path or ever
blinks. We find that
out the hard way.

Or maybe *someday*
in your gurney, on the way to
surgery, wrapped as if some
pharaoh from a tomb, he'll recite
a pair of couplets
when he's twelve,

one about the crow
which soars aloft;
a greening, sprouting
twig held in its
beak—

the other to say the
night has finally fallen,
the flood has finally
ceased this time for
good.

When the Other Shoe Drops

The pairs frequently worn
line up on the rack, like
brooding black hens
waiting their turn.

Some sprint during the weekly
safari expedition,
hunting vegan bargains
amidst the slaughtered beasts.

Faux-leather loafers in the pews
for an hour's Sunday preaching,
sit, stand, kneel, just praying
an end to the day's chaos.

Pointy-toed flats worn to
the interview where one
misspoke word nullifies chances
of the boots in the store window.

Thrifted patent Oxfords,
half-size too small, willing
to stretch, like the budget,
the mirror's surface confines.

When the other shoe drops,
the three-inch pumps appear,
sinking into fresh-turned
dirt beside muddy graves.

Red Nail Polish

A holdover from the 1950s
coloured the threshold to my adolescence:
Grandma always said only harlots wore red.
I opted for pearl white instead,
a subtle signal that, despite
what I'd been through so early in life,
I was a good girl. But twelve is decades
in the past; experience makes me bolder.

I skip over the Sally Hansens
and the upstart brands I've never heard of;
choose a Revlon line called *Sinful Colors*,
assured that it's formaldehyde-free.
On the shelf are glossy and metallic
paint hues lined up like antique Chevrolet
Bel Airs cruising down the strip.

I don't choose *Bitten*, like a vampy Mae West,
or *Gogo Girl*, as Goldie Hawn might have worn,
or *Ruby Ruby*, which I imagine
graced the hands of Princess Margaret.
I select colour number 8-3-9 called *Sugar Sugar*:
a candy apple red,
like Rizzo played by Stockard Channing.

On breaking the seal and pulling out the brush,
the over-powering scent assaults the nose,
as pungent as embalming fluid.

I start with my toes,
swearing when the brush smears.

Two coats and, now, they are someone else's feet
meant for strappy-heeled sandals,
dancing the tango at the club.

Your hands flutter elegantly
when your nails are done; you're ready
to paint the town sparkling red:

To clasp a cigarette
and blow out smoke through
lips stained to match your nails.

To watch your fingers grasp
a glass of champagne
toast memories from the past.

I am compelled to say I also chose,
just in case my nerve left me,
another shade called *Tokyo Pearl*.

Punching Back

She comes here every so often
just to stare life in the face,
look it point-blank and say:

“Is that it?
Because I’ve got more.”

It always calms her,
brings everything back into perspective.

Nothing is right, never was,
most likely never will be,
but when she comes here
and looks out over the water,
peers into the cracks of the pavement,
balances her existence on a guardrail,
she feels she’s punching back,

and though this world will always win,
she will keep coming at it
with balled, knuckly fists
until the day when she no longer can.

When that happens,
she'll fold up shop,
take one more breath,
and let the world do what it does.

Anhedonia

What is this country where my stony selves
struggle to grasp their own shadows? When I
first step ashore, why does Albert Camus
come to the fore? Should I let this pale rhyme
conceal a lack of reason? Dry-eyed before
maman's last journey. Or calculating
the bullets' trajectories on that beach:
one ... two, three, four, five in quick succession.

No, look more closely. It's a Mister K
carrying the 20th century on his back
with no emotional string [theories] attached.
Even the flat face of the landscape probes
no deeper than a series of diversions
to prevent quicksand from having its say.
And the only eruption comes from
a machine that stitches pain to flesh.

No, no. Wrong again. I would be angry
if anger were an option ... mad if madness
still showed the way. We have travelled beyond
singing mice and dogged investigations.
To where a stoic tree—stripped-bare limbs
like signposts for no future—inhales the lashes
of a world gone numb. Where the nameless daily
expect a Turing test to prove they exist.

Or is it just me? I shrug. And wait. For what?
For the hope of a flood to lift me
above the scaffolding I've invented
to keep life at bay. For electric sparks
to jolt me awake at last. For neurons
to jump those gaps left behind by a lack
of ... of what? Conjunctions? Ah, to leap
from fissure to fissure, pulling the selves
into one.

Puzzling over the fate of black holes

Puzzling over the fate of black holes
reminds me of all the information
we lose as we move along those waves
we create that do very little to bend
time and space but make us feel like we're there
right where the action is—or would be.

Puzzling over the fate of black holes
brings to mind an emergency room baby
next to a vomiting centenarian.
Neither as disturbing as the man
in a wheelchair with ear glued to cell phone.

Puzzling over the fate of black holes
relieves me of the duty to concern myself
with the meaning of life and instead
concentrate on learning monty python
skits by heart, the ins and outs of occasional
poetry, and why and why not gravel paths.

The Hedge Sparrow

No, it does not need to be
given a name. Pigeonholed.
Let it retain its air
of mystery, free of the
restrictions we would
place upon it. We are two
worlds that do not so much
collide as brush shoulders,
witness, each to the
presence of the other.
Does it consider that our
ways are predictable, too?
We both observe the fallen
acorns, and read from them
the turning of time's
levelling gaze.

When Ideal Meets a Bar

A ballerina whirls in her music box
to the tin tinkle of old Tchaikovsky

whenever I lift the lid. Whether or
not she continues to twirl as the lid

closes, is up to conjecture and the cat
in Schrödinger's thought experiment—

spinning incessantly inside as if impatient
for her Prince to lift the glass casket lid

and kiss her free from coffin. Paradox
on demand or not. Ongoing nonetheless.

At the bar, my satin-coated feet erect
en pointe, pink crimsoned with effort—

as though practice could make perfect
on these swollen, broken, bloody toes.

Stand on one foot. Now the other foot.
But at eight, my feet are declared too big.

Kicked out of class, I dream svelte instead
and breathe the pink of elephants in tutu.

One Concession to Go

walking a literal mile to school and back

When Peter jumped and strode me despite a struggle,
he washed my face in snow with rough leather mitt.

Taking his own sweet time, he backed off, grinning at
my white mask in triumph: his piece of art, his conquest.

“Oh, he likes you,” crowed the girls as if in a chorus
from *Carousel*: just like Billy the carnival barker.

Blindly I scrambled ungainly to my feet. Snow
stuck my eyelids shut. Cheeks scrubbed to flame

fired with humiliation and fury and wild fore-
shadow of desire in the heavy tangle of limbs, him

on top, the play of power, unfair. I saw red but
could not tell or I’d be told off as tattle-tale and

sissy. The grim code of silence held me frozen all
winter for half a century, coldly complicit as snow.

My father's father was a champion middleweight boxer.
To head off our street bullies, big boys like Peter Puck,

my father taught me to box. I can really throw a punch
still beyond what my arm reaches, surprising left hook.

My first hit landed in a bully's stomach. Instantly, he
threw up his half-digested lunch all over his Oxfords.

No-one threw stone-filled snowballs at me on our long
walk through No Man's Land to our two-room school.

*

I could tread safely the cold country mile to cloak room,
line up at the Girls' door well before the brass bell rang

out late boys left to the strap. Smugly, I'd pull down
the hated leggings mother made me wear, matted pills

of dark blue wool and snarls of snow. Draped on hook,
they'd drip until recess. Shaking reversible tartan skirt

till creases aligned, I'd transform into a proper pupil
behind my desk inkwell, attentive again to the daily
morning exercises that would carry me back to mind.

The window steamed; heat blasted us to Geography
and fractions, Ancient Egypt and complacent rows
of 0's across my scribbler. New words memorized.

No one would have her face wiped in snow again.

When Rules Change, Roles Follow

My first mantra was gleaned from a comic—
“Poof poof piffles, make me just as small
as Sniffles.” This spell I claim for mine.

All I need do is sprinkle magic sand and cross
my fingers so as to join my friend familiar,
a cute and chatty wee rodent called Sniffles.

Mouse size, Mary Jane confronts the family
pet, her formerly cuddlesome calico cat, now
a voracious monster and fearsome hunter who

bears down on her and Sniffles, gleam intent
in globe-green eyes. Through tree-high stalks
of grass, Cat relentlessly stalks his new prey.

Evasive, elusive, Mary Jane weaves her way
between green shoots of grass, the forest she
hides in, precarious shelter to her small self.

Does she recall the formula to shoot herself
back to girl size in time to escape cat’s paws
that would pin her between claws to earth?

I am determined to join Mary Jane and her
familiar on far adventures, knowing a comic
by its end would always see us safely home.

Cut Off

The shop is jammed with glass and porcelain trinkets,
“Greetings from the Jersey Shore” in every font
imaginable, smells of ammonia and hair dye,
something dusty—incense?—and coffee.

Wind chimes tinkle softly,
cheap plate glass daubed vibrant with red Chinese
flowers flashing as their glass strips catch sun;
mesmerizing.

A conglomerate seaside place—trinkets, touch-ups,
tea shop—a fascinating crystal jungle.
Summer heat already creeping
through the screened door.

She chafes in stiff new shorts and top,
age seven, waiting the moment that would bob
her long carmel hair into “a summer do”
at Mom’s insistence.

She likes her hair; Dad loves it—
*but he’s not the one who has to struggle
every day with three girls*, Mom is telling
the nodding beautician as Sis huddles, cornered mouse
in the chair, and golden silk flutters to the floor.

She strays as far as she can, called to heel
over and over, until an hour passes
and it is her turn.

She tenses in the barber chair, the heavy gingham cloth
like a shroud; stares at herself in the mirror—
what will Dad say? Will he even know?
Were they ever going back?

Her gut kicks again—she hears Mom ask,
“Isn’t that nice and cool for the summer?”
sees her head with its mushroom cap of hair;
doesn’t know what to say.

After the seethe of icy rain

deadly whisper in the yard,
a white varnish pins tree limbs
and vines to the sheet ice below.

Pretty—the way enamel is sleek,
dead as a cloisonné pin.
Birds venture out and search—
if not for me, their scratchy dance
would yield nothing.

They seize sunflower seeds from a white tarp
safely above hungry, cold cats
who skitter and slide, hide
under my truck. Yesterday
they prowled through green weeds.

Ice daggers, vampire teeth hang
from gutters I never cleared.
Everything outside my door is coated.
My weight doesn't crack this armor;
my cane can't break through.

I fear this dance on the rumpled sheet ice,
legs panicked by mixed signals—
the give and take of mud or grass has vanished.

I inch like a crone; my spine says
we shouldn't be here.

Forced to hobble to the coop,
I wonder how the cruelty of this coating
could ever be called *magical,*
marshmallow, ice cream, spun glass lace.
Deadly shell smothering life, white pall

in a cycle holding death as lightly
as life. Why it's needed is a mystery
I can't pierce, any more than I can
break through white ice
to the green waiting below.

My Life of Thievery

At dawn I stole a minute,
listened to the rooster yodel his greeting
to the shimmering face of the sun,
stole another to watch
honeyed light stroke the cedar, glint on an aerial.

Afraid of being caught, I stole a morning's silence
to tease the cat with feathers, drink coffee black,
smear homemade jam on bread. I stole
the use of this paper and a good pen and words,
many words, none original.

Always, I've been thieving;
it never felt like mine—not the minutes,
nor the rooms nor the friendships.
Every mouthful snatched from some child
in Russia or China; every spark of happiness belonging
to some unknown deserving hero.

I lived on sufferance, hid poems
in schoolbooks, cast secret glances
at glowing leaves or stormy skies, sucking manna;
always fearing the cost,

some inner snitch threatening
to *out* me to someone with the power
to take it all away.

At any time.

Wily thief, I have lived six decades
running just ahead of the accounting,
still fearful, unrepentant—
I stole a moment just now
to envision how you might enjoy
this poem.

The Hero of Midnight

The hero of midnight gallops past.
He escaped from a Yeats poem
and now he's flailing like a windmill,
eager to outrun the moonrise.
He crossed the Atlantic to warn me
to stay indoors on nights of storm—
snow and ice pouring from holes
in the universe, the wind beating
favorite subjects flat as roadkill.

I listen to him surf the drifts
with a hush of muffled hoofs.
So old-fashioned. The town plow
roars up the road and slots a path
wide enough for a circus to pass.
When dawn comes my snow blower
will growl in its den and emerge
in a huff of fumes. The horseman
will have faded into the woods.

No use in following his tracks.
He isn't heroic in daytime,
even on a gloomy storm day

with the power out and broken trees
stabbing at the eye of everything.
Already snow has filled his hoofprints,
leaving only his midnight cry.

A Plain Old Man

Being a plain old man stuck
in a feral village, I take the wind

as personally as a bar brawl.
Trees consider touching their toes.

A copper weathervane goes south.
Wood smoke flattens and obscures

the innocence of the winter sky.
I read only quarrelsome books,

especially Plato. His version
of Socrates addles the young men

flaunting their marble torsos.
His arguments squeeze their brains

like oranges shipped from Egypt.
The village hunkers down and grins

that bestial grin I first saw
in the Forest Park Zoo when

my mother crushed my hand in fear
of great apes mocking their jailors.

The wind today could topple
a tree and render me homeless,

but I strain my elementary Greek
and believe everything I read.

Sunday Bells

Sunday bells shiver the trees
and shuck their freight of snow.
We listen so carefully our ears
flap like sheets in a windstorm.
But the bells don't invite us
to savor their bronzed dogmas.
They're warning us to stay away
and keep ourselves to ourselves,
as people on British TV say.

Once we tracked an angel across
our limpid slice of the sky.
It turned out to be a vulture
scouting for a roadkill snack.
Another instance involved
young men peddling religion
door to door, their faces fresh
as apple pie, their intelligence
slipped carefully under the door

where we were sure to find it.
Today the new snow brightens
our outlook, and we pretend
to accept the universal terms
of life beyond cremation.

The bells aren't fooled. They halt
their pealing and stand akimbo
in their steeples, their effort
too effortless to matter to us.

A Sort of Metamorphosis

A sizeable chrysalis
affixed to the soffit,
ceases to be in its
protective coating,
larva within a riffle
of airfoils.

A confidante of mine,
tucked in for the night,
by the Oceanside,
patiently marks her
remaining time, waits
for her failing flesh
and bones, a tenuous
eggshell beneath
the sheets to finally
escape.

Upon the bookshelf,
I keep a snapshot
of her posing in
a butterfly blouse,
along with her encircling
family donned in their
expedition attire.

Camouflaged under
the sheets, Pale Death
knits its chrysalis
where she will liberate
herself, then take wing
and fly into the
Eminent Light.

Asea

Since there's no fixed
destination in which to sail,
since this horizon refuses
to encompass its astral bundle,
since the winds often shift
without forewarning, and I'm
never sure as to why, and since
it's nighttime and time keeps
trooping on, I am alarmed.

If there were somewhere in
which to sail, an arid land
whose lushness were mopped
up by the moon, bountiful clouds
of drifting seabirds might then
form a vortex then funnel
right into my port at dawn.

If the hazy horizon were to
encompass its astral bundle,
then entire millennia might
manage to jut out into the city.
Human histories might
swell the irregular air.

If the wind shifted, altered in
such a way that I was aware of it
ahead of time, then I might slip
the sky into my breathing of air
requiring more than the meagre
amount within my lungs.

Sunflowers and starry nights

When paintings become reality...

Getting to know you is a blissful journey into the cosmos.

I haven't had a pitch-black night ever since.

A sunflower turned to you on a rainy day,

Matter-of-fact,

You scintillate too

The Dutchman chuckled before vanishing.

Elysium

*where Roses aren't red
while violets pique themselves as your favourite colour...*

I can finally let down my guard
They'll never reach this place,
for they aren't poets.

Purple rain purple rain,
Hear the pitter-patter on a summer afternoon
Flowers perk among lush Retinal foliage.
I am far from earth
Never to return
Ever since I crossed the event horizon.
There is a purple world out there
orbiting your star...

Let's Talk About Lucy

How she will never utter
The identical word twice.
Counts each available syllable
To make certain she's not above
A limit she allots herself,
Or the bottom falls out
Of whatever top she displays.
Carries around a marble cross,
Just as a conversation piece,
When any discussion lags
Longer than a few moments.
Comes to the aid of a party,
Who wouldn't claim her
If she tried joining it.
Plays fast and loose with fire
But won't ignite a spark,
Unless hired by brazen thieves,
Matching the usual description.
Sweats she's coming into money
Before her next menstrual cycle
Goes boom or, possibly, bust.
Promises she'll marry me,
One week from next Wednesday—
And why should I doubt her?

Fools

Every last one of them.
Lined up in single file—
To make it even worse.
Just waiting out their time
Before the shitshow begins.
Yes, praise his High Holiness,
From northwest to southeast—
And any district in between.
Alas, the country's gone tim-tam.
Fools doing the wing dang doodle,
Whether they want to or not.
It's the damnedest thing.
Meanwhile, I'm packing my bags.
Lighting out for new territory,
Where Huck, Jim, and I conspire—
Raft it up and down big river.
Give our king the icy boot
In water so blessedly bleak,
He freezes, two fathoms deep.

The Most Strenuous Topography

Lamentations as woeful as abandoned houses
you knew the former residents
the tenth generation of sadness
you contemplate your domiciles
before the capture and captivity
and the captors' scowls and invective.

You make a few jokes
offer a handful of children's riddles and rhymes
a diversion, an approximation of song and dance,
you had dazzling photos, you blurt out,
a confessor aroused by the sinful words
the photos proof of kindness and cruelty
but you had traded them
for a lavish meal
and an insincere compliment
along with, you must not omit to mention,
a glimpse at a map
showing in the most strenuous topography
the locations of sanity and escape.

Near Clonakilty

he seems to sit endlessly.
evenings in a house with potential.
drinks two or three bottles
each night. sweet white wine. smokes
cigarettes like they're a cancer
cure, and is difficult
lately to talk to since moving
from london to near clonakilty:
a landscape so violently
beautiful, violently green,
that any mariner on any
rough sea would feel grateful—
he clings to a banister
mast. above the house
in the old orchard.
the last of the apple trees
bruise a light fruit for the wasps.
we sit on old sofas belonging
to his uncle—I suppose my great-
uncle or grand-uncle.
silence comes out of the hills
and gets into everywhere, like damp
in a plasterboard wall.

Where Do Our Sculptures Go

we make sculptures
of our shadows
powdery snow
hardens after

long period of neglect
your chapped lips
my wilting frame

where do my
footprints go after this
freeze lifts

will some come across
this melting monument
*at least they were in
love*



CONTRIBUTORS

James Benger is the author of several books of poetry and prose. He is on the Board of Directors of The Writers Place and the Riverfront Readings Committee, and is the founder of the 365 Poems In 365 Days online workshop, and is Editor-In-Chief of the anthology series. He lives in Kansas City with his wife and children.

Manisha Chummun is from Mauritius. She enjoys delving into astronomy and history during her free time. Her series of poems named *Ad Astra*, arises from her friendship with a pen pal from Türkiye. Her poem, *Eda*, was published in the 8th Issue of Livina Press.

Rebecca Clifford lives in rural Southern Ontario. She enjoys playing with form, word painting, creating new words, resurrecting archaic ones, responding ekphrastically to the work of others and, along with life's flotsam and jetsam, incorporating it into her work. Her work has appeared in Canadian, American, and British journals, newspapers, and e-zines. She is supported in these endeavours by her partner and a disdainful cat of questionable parentage.

Carrie Lee Connel (she/her) lives in Southwestern Ontario as a Treaty Land inhabitant, with her husband, the poet Andreas Gripp. She is an alumna of Western University with an MLIS and a BA in English Language & Literature. Her poems have been included in the anthologies *Stones Beneath the Surface*, *Moon Shine: A Canadian Poetry Collection*, *Another London*, *Piping At The End Of Days*, and *Smitten: This is What Love Looks Like*. Carrie has published three books of poetry, including *Written In Situ* (Harmonia Press, 2020). She currently devotes half her time to writing poetry and fiction, and the

other half to pursuing artistic interests, including watercolour painting and fabric arts.

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Cloud Mountain* (2024). He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell's Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

Bart Edelman's poetry collections include *Crossing the Hackensack* (Prometheus Press), *Under Damaris' Dress* (Lightning Publications), *The Alphabet of Love* (Red Hen Press), *The Gentle Man* (Red Hen Press), *The Last Mojito* (Red Hen Press), *The Geographer's Wife* (Red Hen Press), *Whistling to Trick the Wind* (Meadowlark Press), and *This Body Is Never at Rest: New and Selected Poems 1993-2023* (Meadowlark Press). He has taught at Glendale College, where he edited *Eclipse*, a literary journal, and, most recently, in the MFA program at Antioch University, Los Angeles. His work has been widely anthologized in textbooks published by City Lights Books, Etruscan Press, Fountainhead Press, Harcourt Brace, Longman, McGraw-Hill, Prentice Hall, Simon & Schuster, Thomson/Heinle, the University of Iowa Press, Wadsworth, and others. He lives in Pasadena, California.

Katerina Fretwell's 10th and 11th poetry books were published in 2024, and include her art on the cover: *Familiar and Forgiveness* (Ace of Swords, Montreal) and *Holy in My Nature* (Silver Bow Publishing, New Westminster, BC.) Her eighth, including her art, *Dancing on a Pin*, was longlisted for the League of Canadian Poets' Pat Lowther Prize and was part of the International Festival of Authors *Battle of the Bards*. Her poems have appeared in over 70 North American and Welsh journals and over 90 North American Anthologies.

Andreas Gripp was born and raised in Treaty 6 Territory (London, Ontario) and in 2024 relocated to Leamington with his wife, Carrie. He's the author of over 30 books of verse, including *Clocking the Equus: Poems Selected and New* (2025). His poetry is inspired by the contemporary experiences of both common and uncommon people. The poems in this issue are from a manuscript-in-progress called *Vaudeville Messiah*.

Gregory Wm. Gunn was born in 1960 in Windsor, Ontario. His formative years were spent in a few small towns before lastly settling in London, Ontario in 1970. Engaged in some of the visual arts from a young age, then concentrating on music and writing during his scholastic stretch at Fanshawe College in the early '80s, he has been dutifully refining his skills in both those disciplines ever since. He has been published in various literary periodicals including *The Toronto Quarterly*, *Side-B Magazine*, *Inscribed Magazine*, *Burning Wood*, *20 X 20 Magazine*, *Crack the Spine*, *Covalence*, *Blue Lake Review*, *The Light Ekphrastic*, and many others. He is currently compiling his 13th volume of poems.

Art Heifetz teaches ESL to immigrants and refugees in Richmond, Virginia. He has published 230 poems in 26 countries, winning second prize in the Reuben Rose International Poetry Competition in Israel.

Erin Jamieson's writing has been published in over eighty literary magazines, receiving two Pushcart Prize nominations. She is the author of four poetry chapbooks, including *Fairytales* (Bottle Cap Press). Her debut novel, *Sky of Ashes, Land of Dreams* was published by Type Eighteen Books.

Peycho Kanev is the author of 12 poetry collections and three chapbooks, published in the USA and Europe. His poems have appeared in many literary magazines, such as: *Rattle*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Evergreen Review*, *Front Porch Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Sheepshead Review*, *Off the Coast*, *The Adirondack Review*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *The Cleveland Review* and many others.

Delighting in multimedia, poet and playwright **Penn Kemp** is active across the web. Her collection, INCREMENTALLY, is up as an e-book and album on hempressbooks.com/authors/penn-kemp. Please see <https://seaofpo.vispo.com?p=pk> for the animation. Updates are on pennkemp.weebly.com pennkemp.wordpress.com and pennkemp.substack.com

DS Maolalai has been described by one editor as "a cosmopolitan poet" and another as "prolific, bordering on incontinent". His work has been nominated thirteen times for Best Of The Net, ten for the Pushcart Prize and once for the Forward Prize, and his poems have been released in three collections: *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016), *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019) and *Noble Rot* (Turas Press, 2022).

Susan McCaslin has authored nineteen volumes of poetry including her most recent, *Field Play* (Ekstasis Editions, 2024). She completed her Ph.D. in English Literature at UBC in 1984 and taught English and Creative Writing at Douglas College in New Westminster, BC for twenty-three years. In 2012, she initiated the Han Shan Poetry Project, which drew on poetry to help save an endangered forest in Glen Valley, Langley, near her home. In 2012, her *Demeter Goes Skydiving* (University of Alberta Press, 2012) was shortlisted for the BC Book Prize for Poetry (Dorothy Livesay Award) and was the first-place

winner of the Alberta Book Publishing Award. Her website: susanmccaslin.ca

Catherine McGuire is a writer/artist with a deep concern for our planet's future, with five decades of published poetry, six poetry chapbooks, a full-length poetry book, *Elegy for the 21st Century*; a SF novel, *Lifeline*; and a book of short stories, *The Dream Hunt and Other Tales*. Find her at cathymcguire.com

The author of more than two dozen novels, plays, film scripts and short story and poetry collections, **Michael Mirolla**'s publications include a novella, *The Last News Vendor*, winner of the 2020 Hamilton Literary Award, as well as three Bressani Prizes: the novel *Berlin*; the poetry collection *The House on 14th Avenue*; and the short story collection *Lessons in Relationship Dyads*. His latest poetry collection, *At the End of the World*, was short-listed for the 2022 Hamilton Literary Award. A symposium on Michael's writing was held in Toronto on May 25, 2023. In September of 2023, Michael took part in a writers residency in Olot, Catalonia where he polished a novella, *How About This ...?*, which is scheduled for publication in September 2025 (At Bay Press). In July 2024, Michael participated in a month-long writers residency in Barcelona. From September 2024 to June 2025, Michael is the WIR for the Regina Public Library. Born in Italy and growing up in Montreal, Michael now makes his home on a farm outside the town of Gananoque in the Thousand Islands area of Ontario.

Ben Nardolilli is a theoretical MFA candidate at Long Island University. He writes poetry, prose, and the occasional political flotsam and jetsam. In his spare time, he likes to go to a law firm and edit documents related to asbestos litigation. Occasionally they pay him for this. Follow his publishing journey: mirrorsponge.blogspot.com

W. E. Pasquini lives and writes in Upstate New York. Her poetry has appeared in *Magma*, *Cider Press Review*, *The Meadows*, and *Fourth River*, among others. She has been nominated for two Pushcarts and a Best of the Net and has been a finalist in various book and chapbook competitions, such as New River Press's MVP Contest. Pasquini received an MFA in creative writing and studied film at the University of South Florida.

Michael Russell (he/they) is the queer, mad mother monster behind two chapbooks: *gallery of heartache* (forthcoming from 845 Press) and *Grindr Opera* (Frog Hollow Press). They are the coauthor of the chapbook *Split Jawed* with Elena Bentley (forthcoming from Collusion Books). As always, he thinks you're fantabulous. Insta: @michael.russell.poet

Poet, fiction writer, and playwright **J. J. Steinfeld** lives on Prince Edward Island (Epekwitk), where he is patiently waiting for Godot's arrival and a phone call from Kafka. While waiting, he has published 24 books, including *An Unauthorized Biography of Being* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions, 2016), *Absurdity, Woe Is Me, Glory Be* (Poetry, Guernica Editions, 2017), *A Visit to the Kafka Café* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2018), *Gregor Samsa Was Never in The Beatles* (Stories, Ekstasis Editions, 2019), *Morning Bafflement and Timeless Puzzlement* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2020), *Somewhat Absurd, Somehow Existential* (Poetry, Guernica Editions, 2021), *Acting on the Island* (Stories, Pottersfield Press, 2022), and *As You Continue to Wait* (Poetry, Ekstasis Editions, 2022).

Eamonn Stewart was born in 1964 in Belfast, and, while still at school, won first prize in the Irish Children's National Poetry Competition, on two occasions. He trained in advertising photography and worked as a curator in a photographic gallery. Now, he is

retired due to ill health, but occasionally works pro bono as a director of photography on student films. His passion these days is for large-format fine-art photography.

J.M. Summers was born and still lives in South Wales. Previous publication credits include *Another Country* from Gomer Press and various magazines & anthologies. The former editor of a number of small press magazines, he is currently working on his first collection.

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Sola Poēta

Issue I



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Dénouement

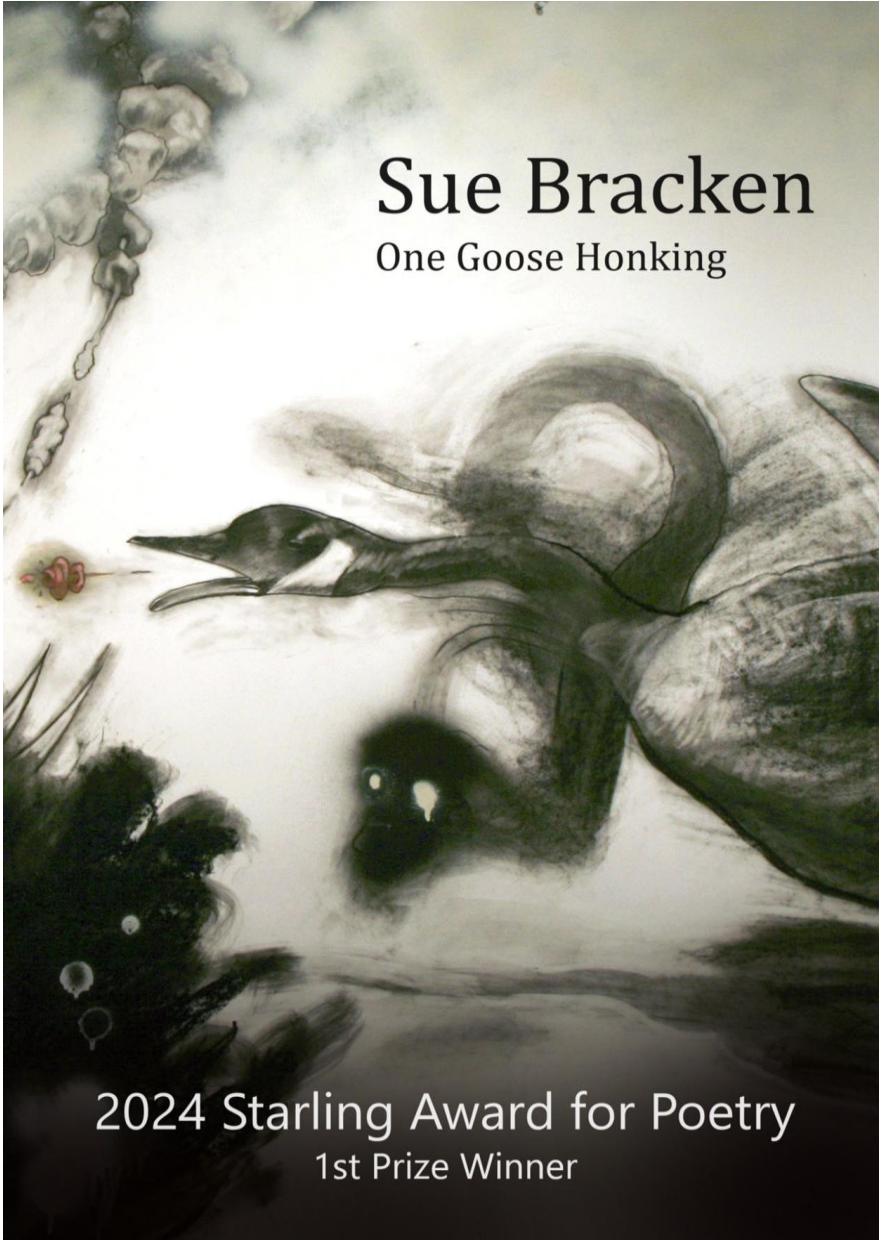
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20 poets on the theme of finality, coda, and epilogue.

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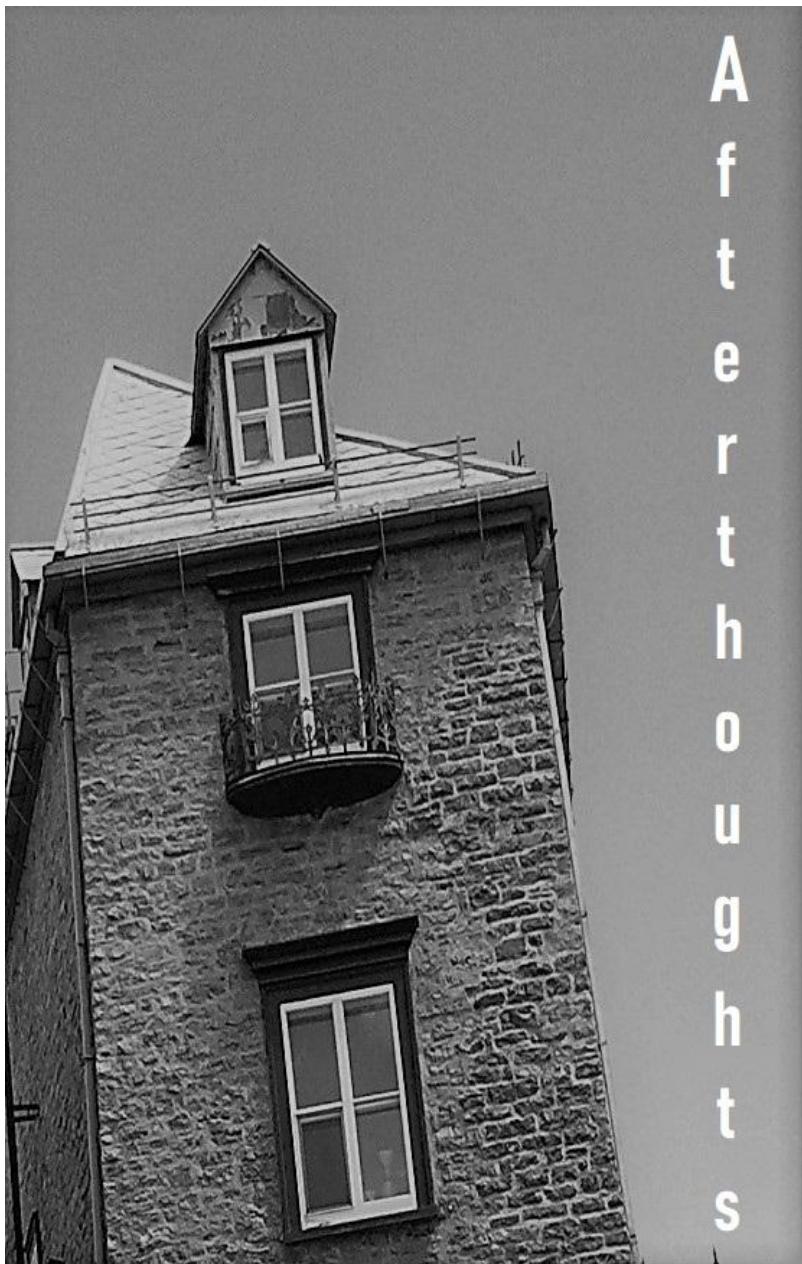


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Please email your submission (up to 5 poems) as a separate attachment (**MS Word** is strongly preferred).

Please include a brief bio of yourself as well in case your work is selected for publication.

Email address: **silverstarlingpress@gmail.com**

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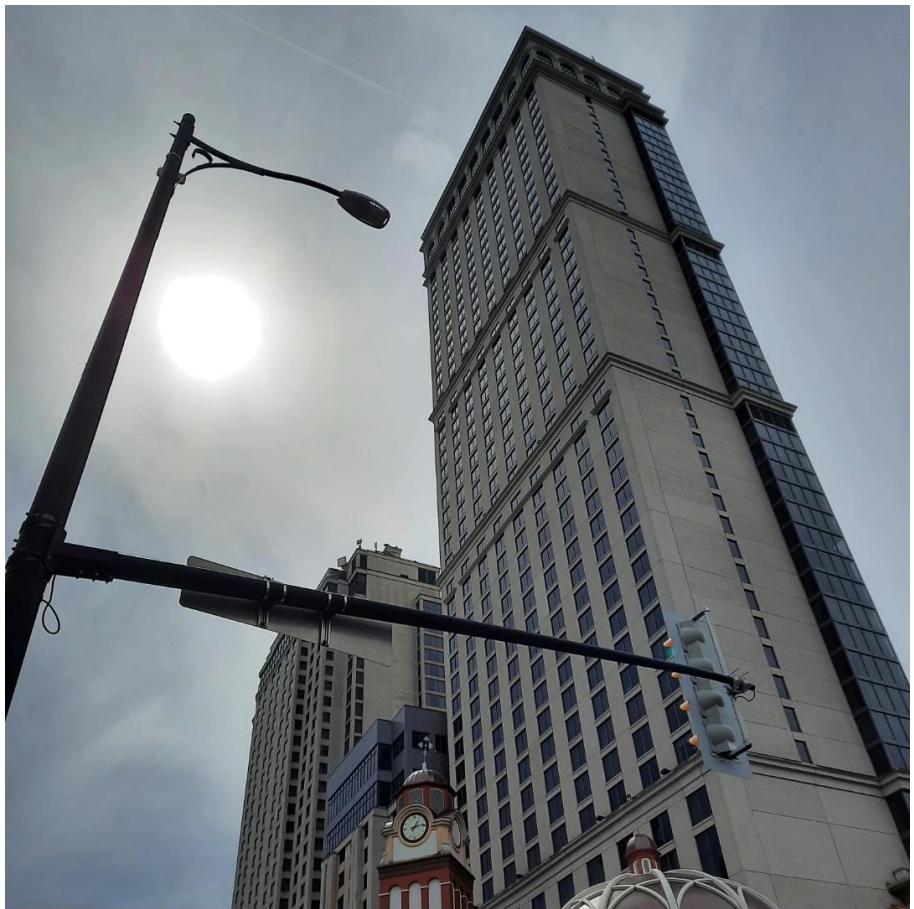
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No *graphic* violence or pornography please.

Send only new and/or previously unpublished offerings (We **don't** regard social media sharing as previously published).

We welcome submissions from **ALL** poets (though please keep in mind the aforementioned), and we especially encourage writing from folks who are IBPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+, Women, People with Disabilities, and Individuals who have been marginalized.



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ISSN 2371-6940